

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who together send the promised Holy Spirit! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“And [the devout Jews from every nation under heaven] were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ... [They] all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:7-8, 12).

Fifty days after Christ’s resurrection and ten days after His ascension, the followers of Christ remain in Jerusalem. They wait. They are waiting under the command their Lord who said, ***“Behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high”*** (Luke 24:49). You see, Jesus was waiting for the perfect time. And that perfect time had come.

When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, He had them observe the Passover the same night, and then He commanded them to celebrate the Passover the same time each year as a memorial of their deliverance and departure from Egypt (Exodus 12:14). From that day of the Passover, they traveled 50 days to Mount Sinai. There, upon Mount Sinai, God gave them the Law through Moses. This fiftieth day was also a day of importance. God, too, commanded them to observe a memorial day every year on the fiftieth day after Passover (Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12).

This fiftieth day after Passover became known as the Feast of the Harvest, or the Feast of Weeks, or simply “Pentecost,” since it took place 50 days after the Passover Sabbath. So, every pious Jew tried to be in Jerusalem for this festival to bring their harvest of grains to the temple. So, on this day, they gathered up their baskets, then processed up Mount Zion as they sang the Psalms of Ascents (Psalm 120-136), then processed into the temple courts where they would present their baskets to the priests.

Pentecost was a major festival as it brought in people from all throughout the world into Jerusalem. For us, we celebrate the Pentecost festival not because of the old history, but because of its new history, because of the sending of the Holy Spirit. This was the perfect time to send the Third Person of the Trinity upon the people.

For the festival pilgrims, Pentecost began just like other Pentecost festivals before them. But this particular Pentecost was going to be unlike any other before it. As the pilgrims are processing through Jerusalem, they begin to hear familiar voices. Their ears perked up! They recognized the dialect. Now, they weren't hearing the Aramaic of Judea, which most of them understood. They weren't hearing the common Greek of the Roman Empire. *"Hey! I'm hearing my language!"* They all heard and understood the apostles speaking the language of their homeland!

To this, they were all bewildered. They were all amazed. They were all perplexed as they said to one another, *"What does this mean?"* (Acts 2:12)

What they were hearing was indeed a miracle! Now, this miracle was not in the hearing, but in the speaking of the apostles. Just like that, the Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak in many languages! And just like that, the people heard. And they questioned what they heard. *"What does this mean?"*

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul writes, *"So faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17). The Church is the people of God – *the believers in Christ*. But believers do not exist apart from the hearing of the Word of God. If people are not told about Jesus Christ and what Christ has done for them, they cannot believe it. So, while the Church is the people of God, it never exists apart from the Marks of the Church – Word and Sacrament. You see, without the message that Christ died on the cross for your sins, the Church does not exist. This crowd gathered because of the miracles that were taking place. They gathered as they said to one another, *"What does this mean?"*

But did you notice that these people, hearing their own language, did not come to faith until Peter had preached the Word of God to them? Yes, *"faith comes by hearing,"* but as St. Paul also says, *"How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? How are they to hear without someone preaching?"* (Romans 10:14)

So, Peter preaches to them the Word of God: *"Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ... This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh'"* (Acts 2:14, 16-17). Peter starts with the Old Testament and applies it to what Jesus had done. Peter preaches Law and Gospel to them. And when they understood what God had done and that they – *because of their sins* – bore responsibility for the death of Jesus, their consciences were cut open.

So, they asked Peter, “*What shall we do?*” and Peter gave them the Gospel: “***Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit***” (Acts 2:38). Three thousand were baptized that very day.

So, what did the Holy Spirit do that day? He gave the apostles the power to reach these pious Jews through the pure Word of God. You see, it was the purity of the Law and Gospel that caused Christ’s Church to grow. And the Holy Spirit works through us in every language to spread the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ that is given to all by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the promised Helper, our salvation in Christ would have been lost. It would have been forgotten. But with the Holy Spirit, He gave the apostles the confidence to preach the Word of the Cross that Jesus died and rose again to give us forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, that Jesus ascended back into heaven as Lord of heaven and earth, who will come again to judge the living and the dead.

But in order to fully understand the Gospel, one needs to see the importance of the Gospel. You see, if you believe you are ***not*** a sinner, then Jesus is of no importance to you. So, the Holy Spirit leads us to acknowledge our sins against God and our neighbor, so that we are ready to hear the message that through Christ’s atoning death, those sins are forgiven. The Holy Spirit is always pointing to Jesus. That is His job. So, He constantly reminds us that we have the Savior, who is Jesus Christ, our Lord. For “***everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved***” (Acts 2:21).

There is also another thing to be noted by the pious Jews response this day: their question, “***What does this mean?***” which is a question that is very familiar to us Lutherans. It is Luther’s question he asks throughout his *Small Catechism*.

Now, how many of us have been perplexed by Luther’s question? How many of us remain perplexed by Luther’s question? It’s certainly good to know the wordage of the Six Chief Parts of the Catechism. But we should never be shallow when it comes to Christian doctrine. Jesus, St. Paul, and Luther all desire that we do not remain as Christians who eat only baby food, but that we mature at eat steak. It’s all well and good to know the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, but what do they mean? How do we fear, love, and trust in God? How do we truly love our neighbor? What does it really mean when we confess the Creed? How do we pray?

How do these first three chief parts prepare us to understand the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar? What does this all mean? Now, the Catechism does give us so many answers, but not every answer to our every question. So, we must all continue to grow as we are nourished by the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace. For if you are not nourished, your faith will wither and die. So, continue to chew on God's Word and inwardly digest it, so that you grow in faith and bear fruits of faith.

Confirmation Sunday so often is equated with graduation. The reality is – *it isn't*. If confirmation were a graduation, there would be no need for Bible Studies, Christian colleges, and seminaries. There would be no need to continue coming to the Divine Service. But confirmation is a commencement. Confirmation is a beginning. Joshua, in just mere moments, you will be confirming your faith in Jesus Christ. You will vow your allegiance to Him, who suffered and died for you, who rose from the dead for you, who is ascended into heaven for you. You will state your intention to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it. You will be hated by the fallen world for what you are about to do, but as your confirmation verse says: ***“Be faithful unto death, and [you will receive] the crown of life”*** (Revelation 2:10b).

Now, you will be tempted to abandon Jesus. Satan will tempt you even more than he already has after today. He will use tactics that promote doubt, and his fallen world will criticize and persecute you. So, I pray that you call upon the name of Jesus, receive His gifts in Word and Sacrament, recall the Catechism, for you have the spiritual weapons to fight off Satan's lies and deceit. May you never forget that.

Today, we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but do you all know that this outpouring continues today and everyday wherever the Gospel is preached? From the very beginning, the one holy Christian and apostolic Church has been about the Word. For Joshua, and all of us here today, may we never forget that Word and Sacrament is at the center of everything. It is the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God that clearly communicates all what the triune God has done for us, that we have the Savior Jesus Christ, that by Him becoming man, His death on the cross, His resurrection from the grave, and His bodily ascension into heaven, we are called to repentance and faith in Him for in Him we receive forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation and all by grace through faith in Him, who is proclaimed by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. + **SOLI DEO GLORIA** +